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Opening New Frontiers in Colonial Spanish American History: New Perspectives on Indigenous-Spanish Interactions on the Margins of Empire

Abstract

Over the past decade, the frontiers of Latin America have received an important scholarly boost, thanks to the research of a number of scholars – seven of whose works are discussed below – who have shifted the focus away from the sedentary societies that the Spanish encountered in Mesoamerica and the Andean region to examine the protracted and difficult process whereby Spaniards incorporated, or attempted to incorporate, the mainly non-sedentary or semi-sedentary peoples who inhabited the margins of empire. Common to all these studies is a concern to explore the agency of indigenous peoples, and as this essay will show, they shed new light on, and contribute greatly to our understanding of, Indian responses to the challenges posed by Spanish colonization and missionization in regions long neglected in the historical literature.

An important field of study for historians of the Spanish Borderlands ever since Herbert Bolton published, in 1917, ‘The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish-American Colonies’¹, the frontiers of colonial Latin America have received a significant and much needed scholarly boost in recent years, following the publication of a number of substantial studies that concentrate attention on the colonization of indigenous groups on frontiers extending from New Mexico and Alta California in the north, to Chile and Argentina in the south.² Of the seven studies selected for discussion, all published in the US since the year 2000, six focus specifically on Indian peoples incorporated, between the early-sixteenth and late-eighteenth centuries, into missions administered by Jesuit and/or Franciscan friars. Although they differ in terms of their overall aims, theoretical approaches, and methodologies, and focus on distinct regions and diverse indigenous groups with varied beliefs, customs, and traditions, these studies all place the experiences and perspectives of the native groups that are their subjects at the center of analysis, and in sharing a concern to explore indigenous historical agency, offer a more balanced understanding of Indian-European interactions in their chosen regions.

Historians of Latin America will be aware, of course, that there is nothing novel in highlighting the experiences and responses of native populations under Spanish rule. This is a path that has been well-trodden since the 1960s, thanks to the ground-breaking work, some it based on native language sources, of a number of scholars – Charles Gibson, James Lockhart, Steve Stern, and Karen Spalding,³ among others – who have influenced and inspired an entire generation of colonial historians. The bulk of the large (and still growing) body of scholarship on indigenous responses to colonization written over recent decades has, however, concentrated on the sedentary societies that the Spaniards encountered in Mesoamerica and the Andean region.⁴ Key to the works under consideration here is that they direct attention away from the sedentary colonial cores to explore the more protracted and often more difficult process of incorporating the mainly non-sedentary and semi-sedentary peoples who inhabited the margins of empire, especially those that came under the control of the missionary orders. Indians in missions everywhere, we know, experienced profound and

far-reaching economic, social, political, and religious change, but, as Barbara Ganson argues in *The Guaraní Under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata*,⁵ Indian peoples were never merely ‘passive receptors of European culture and institutions’, but rather ‘agents who helped shape a major part of their own history’ (5). Yet the ways in which native peoples worked to shape their own histories, the nature of their interactions with both friars and the Spanish world outside the missions, the compromises and adaptations which they forced upon missionaries intent upon imparting an alien religion and foreign values, and the strategies they developed to protect their own beliefs and traditions, and to turn the new challenges and opportunities to their own advantage or to that of their communities, have hitherto been imperfectly understood. Based on a wealth of evidence illustrating the impact and consequences of congregation in missions, these new studies show that, far from meekly succumbing to the demands and strictures that constrained their lives under the supervision of European friars, Indians played active roles in mission life, adapting, accommodating, negotiating, subverting, resisting and, where necessary, rebelling, in efforts to protect, as far as was possible, their interests and autonomy. In this sense, as some of the authors explicitly note, the activities of Indian peoples on the frontiers of Spain’s colonial empire bear comparison with those of central Mexico and Peru. Frontier peoples, it seems, proved as adept as their counterparts in those better-studied regions at assessing which elements of the newcomers’ culture to accept and which to reject, at manipulating factional tensions and jurisdictional conflicts between Spaniards, at using the legal system and language of the colonizers, and at exploiting changing circumstances and events, to protect and pursue native interests, collective or personal.

There was, however, as Robert Galgano argues in *Feast of Souls: Indians and Spaniards in the Seventeenth-Century Missions of Florida and New Mexico*,⁶ ‘no formula to native responses’ (6) to colonization or missionization, but rather ‘multiple native reactions’ (93). Some Indians rejected everything Europeans had to offer, either fleeing or vigorously resisting, sometimes forcibly, the missionaries’ promises of spiritual and material reward. Others, as David Weber has so elegantly demonstrated in *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment*,⁷ took what was most useful from the material culture of the newcomers, in some cases transforming their societies through the adoption of European horses, tools, and weapons, and in the process enhancing their capacity to continue to resist subjugation to the Spanish (52-90). For a variety of complex reasons, many others opted to join missions, and of those who did, some engaged with, and readily incorporated, aspects of European culture, including some of its religious rituals and iconography, interpreting these in Indian ways and adapting them to Indian purposes. Some embraced more wholeheartedly the religion and customs of the newcomers, but even in these situations, new ideas and practices could exist alongside, or be blended with, older beliefs and traditions. Everywhere where Indians made the move to missions, elements of native culture survived – in many cases long after secularization.

Using the examples of California, the Gran Chaco, and Nueva Vizcaya, this essay begins by briefly drawing attention to important differences between the experiences of native peoples on Spanish America’s frontiers, with particular reference to the variety of factors that could affect responsiveness to missions, and the impact and consequences thereof – among others, the timing of first contact and congregation in missions, the size and proximity of the Spanish settler population, and the value of the resources available to Europeans for exploitation. This essay does not, however, purport to offer a thorough comparison of mission experiences across all frontiers. It cannot discuss in detail the particular features of the various regions under discussion, or the great diversity of the peoples who inhabited them. Nor does it

explore the reasons why some peoples did not survive as distinct ethnic entities in the longer term – the several hundred thousand Xiximes, Acaxeers, and Conchos, for example, whose histories under colonialism are recorded in Susan Deeds' *Defiance and Deference in Mexico's Colonial North: Indians under Spanish Rule in Nueva Vizcaya*⁸ (6, 191). Whilst acknowledging the devastating long-term environmental, biological, and cultural impact of conquest and colonization on many frontier groups, this essay seeks instead to draw attention, through discussion of examples chosen from the seven studies selected, to one key theme – namely, the extent to which Indian peoples participated in the process of shaping their lives following contact with Europeans, and the variety of strategies, *short* of rebellion, through which they attempted, even within the context of the missions, to retain aspects of their own cultures while engaging with that of the Spaniards, and to secure their survival. In this sense, these studies all shed new light on Indian-European relations in colonial Latin America, and add real substance to the view, summarized by Donna Guy and Thomas Sheridan, that 'Spanish conquest was a biological and cultural disaster for many native peoples, but those who survived manipulated the symbols, material items, and even the legal system of the conquerors to protect their communities and pursue their own goals within the empire'.⁹

The decision to leave behind communities, extended families, social networks, and ways of life was one that Indians on the frontiers of Spain's American empire were rarely able to make entirely freely. The arrival of Europeans – secular and/or religious – invariably set off a series of local changes that could, over time, leave native peoples with little choice but to exchange old lifeways for what the missions had to offer. In *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850*,¹⁰ Steven Hackel shows that in California, for example, where Spanish settlement was delayed until the 1770s, the 'unwitting silent armies of pathogens, plants, and animals' that priests and settlers brought with them transformed the 'human and natural landscape', rendering Spaniards' institutions 'nearly invincible' (65). The multiplication and dispersal of Spanish livestock, together with the spread of plants and weeds onto Indian lands and villages, displaced many native food sources, provoking a subsistence crisis which, far from leading Indians to reject missions, actually had the opposite effect. Ecological change, combined with the catastrophic effects of epidemic disease in this region of recent Indian-European contact, led Indians to priests in large and growing numbers, expanding mission labor forces, promoting their growth, and making possible the production of crop surpluses that attracted others from more distant villages and regions to abandon their settlements in favor of the security which the missions seemed to afford. European friars could not guarantee future Indian survival, however: a combination of low fertility and high mortality (largely the result of chronic illness) left the indigenous population unable to sustain itself through natural increase, which meant that the missions, initially successful in recruiting Indians in search of subsistence and security, were in this sense to prove a failure when assessed in the longer term (65-123).

Deterioration of the Indians' economic base, a consequence of the introduction of European livestock and technologies, was also a key factor driving large numbers of Guaycuruan peoples of the Gran Chaco, from the 1730s onwards, to opt for mission life. As James Saeger shows in *The Chaco Mission Frontier: The Guaycuruan Experience*,¹¹ however, congregation in missions in the Chaco had nothing like the devastating demographic effects on native populations that it did in California. This is because contact between Indians and Europeans in this region – either for war or for trade – had begun almost two centuries before, in the 1550s. Between the mid-sixteenth and the mid-eighteenth centuries, Indians adopted the horse; added beef to a diet traditionally based on game, fish, and wild plants; raised sheep for wool and food; and incorporated iron tools and weapons that made warfare and hunting more

effective. Over time, changing hunting techniques and practices – in particular, the intensification of the search for game, the furs and skins of which were traded for the knives and needles that had become essential in native society – combined with the damage caused by the Indians' own grazing animals, and with Spanish exploitation of forest resources, to drive Guaycuruans to the missions, where they could enjoy regular access to food, clothing, and metal tools (xiv, 24-5, 59-64). The two centuries of exposure to and interaction with Spaniards, however, ensured that those who opted for residence in mission villages (approximately half of all Guaycuruan peoples) did not experience the virulence of earlier outbreaks of epidemic disease (although they could still be devastating when they did occur). Nor do Indians appear to have been especially susceptible to chronic illness: according to Saeger, by the mid-eighteenth century, Indian death rates were comparable with those of Spaniards in nearby settlements. No doubt these features of the Guaycuruan experience, combined with the fact that departure or desertion from missions remained both possible and common, explain why missionaries were rarely harmed, and why no large-scale rebellions of the kind that occurred frequently in Nueva Vizcaya, as well as many other frontier regions, ever took place in the Chaco (180-81, 188).

In Nueva Vizcaya, the ebb and flow of an infinitely more lengthy and difficult process of mission establishment, chronicled in Susan Deeds' *Defiance and Deference*, was greatly affected by the existence of resources, especially silver, that had an impact on the size of the settler population and the nature of the labor regimes in operation there. Silver attracted a substantial settler population (sometimes hard upon the heels of missionaries), creating pressures for land, for water, and for labor which made the region unstable, sparked frequent outbreaks of rebellion, and rendered the task of the friars especially difficult.¹² The discovery of silver at Guanceví in the early 1620s, for example, soon after the establishment of the Jesuits' nearby mission of Santa Catalina and the presidio of Tepehuanes, prompted the immigration of some 500 single men, leading to the almost immediate drafting of missionized Tepehuanes to provide *repartimiento* labor for the mines (59-60). Local *haciendas* that supplied the mines and settlements with food also required Indian labor. As the case of the Tarahumaras of the Santiago Papasquiaro area in the 1720s shows, these demands could be so excessive that some missions might even have been 'virtually depopulated of able-bodied males during peak harvest periods' (112). Missions, of course, in congregating native populations, actually served (and were intended so to serve) to make accessible a labor pool for the region's miners, farmers, and other entrepreneurs; the friars themselves, moreover, as Deeds shows, were not averse to exploiting mission populations for labor. Nevertheless, some Indians evidently perceived that missions afforded at least an element of freedom and protection. When in 1699, for instance, Franciscans attempted to revitalize Mission San Pedro de los Conchos, a number of Concho families who had for some fifteen years resided in haciendas in the Valle of San Bartolomé (and who may not even have been part of the original mission) asked to be relocated to San Pedro (105).

Notwithstanding the array of factors that could influence, perhaps even determine, Indian responsiveness to missions – be this for spiritual comfort, material goods, or protection from less desirable Europeans – on the whole Spanish missionaries charged with the colonization and conversion of frontier populations shared common goals (despite differences in approach between the religious orders) and usually employed similar methods to achieve those goals. Missionaries, of course, sought to convert, but they also sought to 'civilize' – to create economically viable, permanent settlements of Europeanized Christian Indians. To these ends, they congregated dispersed populations within mission towns, imposed strict regimes of work for the upkeep and development of the mission complex, instructed children and adults

in the rudiments of the faith (often through the medium of music and song), enforced attendance at Mass and at the numerous religious festivals that punctuated the Catholic calendar, and made strenuous efforts to change attitudes towards, and practices relating to, gender, sexuality and the human body, marriage and divorce. In addition to native religious beliefs and practices, polygamy and polygyny, adultery, premarital sex, nakedness and 'drunkenness' were all considered sinful, or potentially sinful, aspects of native life that had to be eradicated. In none of these areas of native life, however, and despite the friars' frequent resort to corporal punishment and other extreme measures to enforce compliance¹³ – such as the locking up of single women in the *monjeríos* discussed in James Sandos' *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions*¹⁴ (8, 166) – missionaries never had an entirely free hand in changing the practices and preferences of Indians with whose conversion they were charged.

In accordance 'with their practice of accepting and cultivating', as Steven Hackel argues, 'those elements of native culture that facilitated their control and conversion of Indians' (251), missionaries on the frontiers, like their religious and secular counterparts elsewhere in Spanish America, looked to the native leadership class – the 'gatekeepers to Indian labor and souls', to borrow Robert Galgano's phrase (92) – to participate and share in the operation and governance of the missions. There were variations in practice and custom as regards selection processes, number of officials, terminology, range of duties, and degree of autonomy exercised by the native leadership, which to an extent at least reflected pre-contact forms of political organization. However, Barbara Ganson's analysis of the development of native government within the Jesuit missions among the Guaraní is useful in illustrating the ways in which missionaries sought to make use of the existing leadership, adapted to conform more closely to Spanish models. Thus, the Jesuits maintained Indian *cacicazgos*, but made them hereditary. They also expanded the native political structure 'by introducing the Spanish concept of the municipality in the form of an Indian *cabildo* at each mission', consisting of a *cacique* (called a *corregidor* in this region) and his lieutenant, as well as a number of other municipal officials - *alcaldes*, *regidores*, *alguaciles*, an *alferez*, and a *mayordomo*. In addition to their role in appointing other native mission officials (captains, sacristans, etc.), Guaraní *cabildo* members were responsible for recording finances and keeping the archive, and, in common with native officials in other frontiers, they also heard grievances, maintained order, oversaw the allocation and performance of tasks, and (in consultation with missionaries) meted out punishments for transgression (58-9).

Invested by Spaniards with authority over their fellow Indians, and enjoying titles, status, and privileges that set them apart from the rest of their communities, caciques and other members of the Indian *cabildos* (as well as interpreters) served as privileged intermediaries between the friars and their own people. Whilst they occupied a privileged space within the mission community, it was also an awkward one, and officials sometimes found themselves caught between the conflicting demands of both sides and unable to satisfy either. Hackel (251-2), Deeds (18-19), and Galgano (92-3) all draw attention to such tensions in the missions of California, Nueva Vizcaya, and Florida and New Mexico respectively. Their effectiveness as leaders, however, as these scholars recognize, actually depended not on the authority conferred upon them by foreigners, but on the extent to which they were perceived as legitimate by the Indian community, and on the degree to which they were able to embed old expectations within the new reality. There were of course ruthless officials who exploited their positions for personal gain – such as the *alcalde* Baltazar of California's Mission San Carlos, who receives a mention in Sandos' *Converting California* for using his position as an opportunity to practice polygamy, and his power over subordinates to punish an Indian for

obeying a priest rather than himself (168-9). The documentary record, however, as illustrated by these studies, abounds with examples of native officials at all levels playing crucial roles in their communities: altering or subverting missionary directives; concealing (sometimes actually promoting and participating in) traditional religious and cultural activities forbidden within the mission environment; protecting their people from priestly punishment; protesting conditions through normal legal channels; and exploiting rivalries between branches of Spanish government to both bring satisfactory resolution to Indian grievances and protect Indian interests.

From the more mundane aspects of the day-to-day operation of the missions, to crucially important decisions regarding such matters as the amount of labor that mission populations could realistically provide: in all areas of native life caciques and other native officers had important functions to fulfill. Barbara Ganson (63) and Steven Hackel (244), for example, draw attention to the importance of *alcaldes* in structuring daily life at the missions (thus providing an element of familiarity and continuity with the old ways), and in protecting their own people from punishment by such means as turning a blind eye to failures to observe rules, and overlooking the reporting of individuals who absented themselves from work or engaged in activities which, as Hackel says, may have been seen as criminal by the friars, but 'had the community's approbation' (244). Referring specifically to Florida and New Mexico, Robert Galgano usefully highlights the importance of interpreters – 'middlemen between Spanish and native cultures' who 'became respected leaders of their communities' – in smoothing daily relations between Indians and friars within the mission environment. Through their control of the process of translation, they were able to 'fudge' instructions – presumably, soften or modify – and, crucially, edit the content of what Indians replied in return. 'By refusing to translate the tone of certain statements or by omitting coarse language', Galgano argues, 'interpreters exercised tremendous power in the negotiation of culture in Spanish missions' (84-5).

Caciques, *gobernadores*, *alcaldes*, and other officials exercised their influence and authority, sometimes decisively, not only within the confines of the mission village but also outside it. Ganson, for instance, discusses among other cases that of the caciques at Mission Yapepú (composed of diverse groups, including the Guaraní) who, resentful of a Jesuit attempt to cut their long hair – 'a symbol of their independent spirit and traditional ways' – traveled to the distant city of Buenos Aires to (successfully) appeal the decision to the secular authorities (40). This action, she considers, demonstrates that the Guaraní were capable not only of identifying and manipulating tensions within the Spanish world, but of working 'within the channels of the Spanish colonial system' and of 'using Spanish mechanisms' to air their grievances and resolve their differences (41). In Nueva Vizcaya, as Deeds' research shows, the native leadership also commonly resorted to, and proved equally capable of utilizing, the mechanisms available to Indians under colonial law. When in the early 1720s, for instance, Indians at Santiago Papasquiaro and its visita town of Atotonilco began to face increasingly intolerable demands for labor, Tarahumara *gobernadores* and other officials sent delegations to protest their conditions to the secular authorities; when efforts were subsequently made to arrest Atotonilco's *gobernador* for his refusal to comply with requests to provide repartimiento labor, Indian officials cited Spanish law to justify that decision (112). Two decades later, in the 1740s, Fabián Juan, Tarahumara governor of Mission Satevó's visita town of Santa Ana de la Joya, led another Indian delegation, this time with the aim of persuading a land judge (to no effect) that a section of wooded land, recently lost to local Spanish *vecinos* intent on cutting down the trees to make charcoal for use in the mines, 'were essential to the subsistence of the village' (128). In late-seventeenth century Florida, on the

other hand, where secular-ecclesiastical conflict resulted in what Robert Galgano describes as a ‘tug of war for mission Indians’ (90), the native leadership sought instead to exploit intra-Spanish tensions, lodging complaints, during secular visitations, against those missionaries they perceived to have neglected protocol in failing to consult with the chiefs on a variety of matters of importance to the Indian population, but appealing to ‘the friars to intervene on their behalf against soldiers’ demands’ (100). As the Tarahumara cases mentioned above reveal, Indian officials were not always successful in protecting their people from abuse and exploitation. Two points are in order here, however. First, as Ganson argues for the Guaraní, Spanish reliance on native leadership did enable Indians to play a role in the day-to-day functioning of the missions (61), while cabildos gave them ‘a voice in their affairs and a channel for expressing their grievances’ (155), which as she shows many used to great effect. Secondly, whilst Indian willingness to utilize the judicial system of the colonizers should not be taken to imply ‘that Indians embraced or even accepted as legitimate judicial processes that had been imposed on them’, as Hackel makes clear, it does indicate that they ‘grappled with the rules and attempted to turn them to their advantage’ (365-6).

Protest and resistance could, of course, take many forms, and as these studies also show, Indians who were not part of the leadership class found their own individual ways to subvert the demands and limitations of daily life under missionary supervision. James Sandos and Barbara Ganson, approaching their sources with a view to exploring, respectively, the ‘hidden transcript’ and the ‘weapons of the weak’,¹⁵ offer useful examinations of the myriad ways in which even Indians who in time came to accept mission life, adapted to new work habits, and adjusted to new rituals and lifeways, could also engage, as Sandos expresses it, ‘in nonmilitant resistance to the perceived exploitation of everyday life’ (157). In *Converting California*, Sandos focuses on ‘day-to-day’ forms of resistance, and details through discussion of numerous examples the variety of strategies employed by California Indians to assert control over their own lives. Thus, for Sandos, the 1806 fire at Mission San Miguel, which damaged the church roof but, more importantly, destroyed almost all the buildings used for manufacturing, as well as the hides and cloth that constituted the raw materials, and the tools required to work them, ‘smacks of neophyte arson from the hidden transcript of that mission’ (163). Behavior which the missionaries considered sinful, as well as graffiti in the form of the ‘abusive’ scratched or painted drawings since discovered beneath layers of whitewash at several California missions, including, at Mission San Miguel, within the choir loft itself (occupied by the most favored of neophytes – the singers and musicians) can also be interpreted from the perspective of the hidden transcript. Whereas sin served to affirm ‘Indian culture through reiteration of Indian social and sexual practices that the priests proscribed as sinful and for which observed sinners were physically corrected’ (164), graffiti serves as evidence that ‘Indian churchgoers did not always focus their attention on the Christian ritual’ (165). Attributing motive to Indian actions – especially criminal actions where the evidence often comes to us through testimony obtained under duress - is notoriously difficult, as Ganson acknowledges. In *The Guaraní*, however, she nevertheless convincingly draws attention to numerous acts of day-to-day resistance to demonstrate ‘that the Guaraní were not acquiescent to Spanish rule’, but rather ‘made important decisions about the fate of their own lives and those of their families, and about their communities’ lands and resources’ (138). Amongst these she cites cattle rustling, homicide and theft, labor slowdowns, and feigned illness - even mass feigned illness, as shown by the late-eighteenth century case of the fifty women at Mission Santa María who claimed to be too ill to spin thread (151-2).

Among the most ‘important decisions’ which indigenous populations on all Spanish America’s frontiers made following contact with Europeans were those that related to the spiritual side of native life. In the religious sphere, however, as in all others, Indian peoples were able to retain elements of traditional belief and practice despite missionary supervision and a strict and regimented programme of religious instruction. In part, as James Saeger explains in *The Chaco Mission Frontier*, this was a product of the nature of the mission itself: in the Chaco (as in all other regions) the baptized (the converted or potentially converted) were never entirely isolated from the unbaptized and still-resistant, and this meant that well into the mission era, contact continued with those ‘who practiced the old rites’ (153). Even as Guaycuruans participated in Catholic celebrations such as Holy Week and the various festivals in honor of patron saints – rituals which ‘gave a new spark to’ and ‘made life interesting’ (99) – and even as they gradually came to accept Catholicism, old beliefs survived. Thus, phenomena like comets continued to be interpreted by mission Guaycuruans ‘as harbingers of evil foretelling calamities’ (153); Abipon women continued to throw ashes when a storm approached, believing that if the storm ate the ashes and was satisfied, it would move elsewhere (153). And because Guaycuruans continued ‘to believe in supernatural causes of death and disease’, shamans were still called upon, and paid, to assist in the curing of the sick; shamanic failure to cure illness was interpreted not as sign that the old ways had been defeated and replaced, but as proof that the shaman’s abilities had been ‘overcome by those of a more powerful practitioner’: friars were merely recognized ‘as shamans connected to a more powerful deity’ (154-5).

Neither the survival of native beliefs and practices within, nor the continuing participation of Indians in ritual ceremonies beyond, the mission environment – those that the Tarahumara continued to perform at the sites of their old settlements or *rancherías*, for instance, which the Jesuits described, as Deeds explains, as ‘drunken binges’ (69) – should be taken to mean that native populations were not open to the possibility of engagement with the rites and rituals of the European newcomers, however. In *Feast of Souls*, Robert Galgano attributes the willingness of many Guales, Timucuas, Apalachees, and Pueblos to participate in Catholic rituals and ceremonies to the fact that it had always been possible, in pre-contact times, to co-opt foreign spiritual power to meet new spiritual needs. Participation in the new did not imply a rejection of the old, however, but a supplement or addition that could enhance the spiritual efficacy of traditional practices (75). Where Indians engaged with Christian ideas and saints, he states, they did so on their own terms, and in much the same way as they would commune ‘with their own pantheon of spiritual beings’. The Pueblos, for instance, included Christian characters in traditional dances – such as that of the sacred clowns – in order to bring ‘new sources of spiritual power’, but these were understood ‘under Pueblo modes of comprehension and communication’ (66-7). In *Children of Coyote*, Steven Hackel focuses instead on the similarities between the religious symbols and ceremonies of Catholics and Californians, and explores the ways in which such overlaps facilitated native ‘participation in the religious life of the missions’ (162) and ‘apparent acceptance of many aspects of Catholic worship’ (166). Two particularly striking examples of overlap and acceptance are discussed in this study. First, the similarities between the tall wooden crosses which Spaniards erected to mark possession of territory in the name of God and King, and the tall wooden poles which Indians throughout California raised to both lay claim to lands and honor deities, which demonstrated to Indians that both they and the Spaniards ‘symbolized and invoked their deities in similar ways, through inanimate wooden structures that symbolized deeper beliefs’ (163). Secondly, Hackel draws attention to the painting of Saint Raphael as a young native Chumash man, attributed to a local Indian artist, which hung at Mission Santa Inés. ‘The image blends native and Catholic images and represents a previously unappreciated melding

of Indian beliefs with Catholicism that was common elsewhere in New Spain', he argues, and shows that 'the Chumash interpreted Catholicism and mission life through their own cultural conventions, and [that] elements of Catholic belief could be assimilated into a Chumash world view' (168).

The complexity of the process whereby indigenous groups on Spanish America's frontiers adopted aspects of the new culture, adapted to Indian purposes, is further discussed in Ganson's *The Guaraní* and Sandos' *Converting California*. Analysing what she identifies as a process of 'transculturation'¹⁶, whereby 'the Guaraní selected, rejected, or reinvented from the ideas, material culture, and customs introduced to them by the "other"' (12), Ganson mentions the new 'artisan crafts, and products' which were incorporated 'into their economic and social lives' (84), but draws particular attention to what the Jesuits' policy of instructing Indian children in mathematics and reading and writing skills meant for the Guaraní in the longer term. First, it enabled Indians to 'keep track of their community property', carry out trade, and communicate in writing with each other, but over time, and more importantly, literacy actually became a weapon of resistance: when, under the terms of the Treaty of Madrid (1750), the Guaraní were required to relocate away from the seven missions that the treaty conceded to the Portuguese, cabildantes wrote letters, 'on behalf of all the men, women, and children in the missions', to explain 'their current predicament' and to seek a solution (98). When no solution acceptable to Indians was forthcoming, the Guaraní resorted to the writing of leaflets and handbills: distributed to all the missions west of the Uruguay River, they called on Indians to make war on Spaniards (104-5). 'Never before', Ganson argues, 'had the Guaraní engaged in the use of war leaflets with the intent to discredit their enemies and persuade others of their right to remain on their lands. They had learned to fight the Europeans on their terms' (105).

James Sandos, meanwhile, in what is the most original and valuable contribution which *Converting California* makes to the literature on missionization, draws attention to the impact and consequences of the efforts of Franciscans in a number of the region's missions to train the most musically talented neophytes in European music and song – an aspect of the conversion process which has 'heretofore [been] largely overlooked' (130). From the very beginning of missionization in California (under the first – still controversial – Father President, Junípero Serra), Franciscans considered music and song to be a key medium through which to involve both choir and congregation in the celebration of the Mass, thereby facilitating the integration of participants into the Church and, by extension, into the Mystical Body of Christ 'to which all baptized members of the faith automatically belonged' (130). The most ambitious and able of Californian friars, however, sought to do more than merely encourage congregations to participate through memorization and repetition of the sung Mass. They sought also to create highly-trained choirs capable of singing the Gregorian plainchant that was central to the celebration of High Mass on Sundays and feast days (135). Particularly notable in this regard was Father Narciso Durán who, following his arrival at Mission San José in 1806, sought to end reliance on rote memorization by teaching his Indian choristers to read music, and by providing for his singers to learn to play the instruments (violin, flute, trumpet, drums) that would enable them to 'accompany themselves while singing the Mass' (137). Significantly, Durán is also said to have attempted to capture in his own liturgical music the sad and melancholy sound of native Californian music. 'If true', Sandos states, 'then the social context in which Durán composed directly influenced church music in California and made it, if not exactly a shared musical liturgy, then one which was at least significantly influenced by those being missionized'. The Franciscan's students, he argues, 'taught the teacher in the context of reciprocity' (138).

Although Sandos does not specifically refer to it as such, Durán and his musician-choristers are prime examples of the process of transculturation to which Ganson refers in the context of writing and the Guaraní. Whereas the latter used their new knowledge and turned it against the Spanish in order to protect their lands and villages from take-over by the Portuguese, the choristers and musicians who are central to Sandos' analysis utilized their musical skills to improve their own positions and status and by extension those of their families. Members of the mission choirs, we learn – thirty to forty men and boys at each – enjoyed greater social mobility, becoming a high status group within the native community, distinguished from the general population by both their clothing and the skilled jobs (weavers, shoemakers and blacksmiths) with which they were favored by the friars. Possessing greater familiarity with the Spanish language through closer contact with the priests, moreover, choristers were also able to have more frequent contact with non-Indians, and earned additional income outside the missions by playing secular music to entertain guests at weddings, receptions, and other events. Thus, as Sandos concludes, through the use of music missionaries produced unintended as well as intended results: 'Indians who joined the choir and persevered in the practice that the role required gained enormously from the mission. They learned the language of the colonizers better than other Indians did, which helped them learn tasks for which there was better compensation than for tending herds, sowing fields, clearing, planting and picking the fruit from orchards, making adobes, or constructing buildings. They learned skills that could be sold to settlers in addition to the money they made playing secular music at settlers' fiestas.' A significant part of Spanish frontier society thanks to the musical knowledge imparted by the friars, many 'remained loyal to the mission community of which they had been a part long after the buildings had fallen away' (152).

Last, but far from the least of the studies selected for discussion, is David Weber's *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment*. This is a wide-ranging and meticulously researched work of synthesis that explores Spanish interactions not with the missionized, but with those 'savages' and 'wild Indians' who by the closing decades of the colonial period remained unsubordinated to the Crown, having survived centuries of contact and conflict with, as well as the diseases introduced by, the Spaniards (p.54). Two and a half centuries after Columbus' landfall, Weber reminds his readers, the 'conquest' of America was not yet complete: 'independent Indians still held effective dominion over at least half of the actual land mass of what is today continental Latin America, from Tierra del Fuego to present-day Mexico' (p.12). Weber's key contribution in the context of this analysis is to show the ways in which unincorporated Indians on frontiers extending from the far north of Mexico to the southern cone, not unaffected or unchanged by the challenges faced by the colonized, responded to the presence of a new and powerful external threat. Referring specifically to the Araucanians south of the Biobío River, he draws attention to the fact that as early as 1600, Indians were not only in possession of large herds, but had become skilled riders. Contact with Spaniards had also led them to add pikes, sabers, swords, and machetes to the armory of traditional weapons 'that had worked well in the past' (56), and to adjust their fighting style to take account of 'Spanish military organization, strategy, and tactics' (58). Of even greater significance, the need to assemble larger numbers of fighting males to confront the Spanish led caciques (*loncos*), who had in former times presided over small bands consisting of no more than several extended families, to create loose but properly coordinated larger entities or confederacies, headed by war chiefs, whose functions expanded to include the coordination of resistance and negotiation with the Spaniards (58-9). They saw their own prestige and authority increase as 'institutions of war became more fully developed' (80). To respond to the challenge of Spanish aggression, in other words,

Araucanian groups assimilated aspects of the material culture of the Europeans and ‘adapted in ways that strengthened their ability to remain independent of the Spaniards’ (61). A crucial adaptation, he argues, was the amalgamation of ‘small family bands of Araucanian speakers ... into larger social and political units whose structures, values, and ethnic identities differed from those of their forebears’ (59).

Societies that adapted and restructured in ways similar to that of Araucanians ‘had counterparts’, Weber shows, ‘throughout the hemisphere’ (68), the most notable of which were the Pampas, Comanches, and Apaches. Rapidly losing their initial fear of Spanish horses, all these groups learned to appreciate their value as a means of transportation that enhanced their ability to both hunt and raid over greater distances, as a source of food, and as a ‘symbol of status and power’ (80). Acquiring European-introduced goods through warfare, raiding, and trade, they ‘consolidated into larger bands or tribes or found new mechanisms to cooperate when the occasion demanded it’, which made them more effective at both ‘defending themselves from Spanish encroachment’ and ‘negotiating the terms of trade or peace’ (78). The profound transformations wrought by the presence of Spaniards turned these groups into formidable adversaries, and no doubt partly for this reason, relations with Spaniards were not always marked by conflict and violence. In the end, as Weber explains for the case of Araucanía, Indians and Spaniards had each come to depend on the other for trade goods. Araucanians needed iron and silver; Spaniards needed horses, agricultural textiles, and the labor of independent Indians’ (83).

In his Introduction to *Bárbaros*, Weber states that an overriding aim of his study is, following the advice of James Axtell¹⁷, “‘to give proper agency” to Indians and non-Indians alike “without minimizing or ignoring the constraints of power, culture, and biology within which both groups operated”” (18). Purposely, this essay has paid little attention to the variety of methods and mechanisms whereby missionaries, soldiers, and settlers asserted their power and authority over indigenous populations on Spanish America’s frontiers, although these do receive all due consideration in the studies here surveyed. As stated at the outset, the purpose of this essay was instead to draw attention to a key contribution which these studies make to the literature on frontiers and missions, in spite of a documentary record which is often patchy and fragmented compared with that upon which historians of Mesoamerica and the Andean region are able to rely: namely, in concentrating on the agency of the Indian groups who are their subjects, they bring indigenous peoples vividly to life, and show that, like their counterparts elsewhere in colonial Spanish America, they too were willing and able to use whatever means they had at their disposal to protect and advance their own interests, and those of their communities.

¹ Herbert E. Bolton, ‘The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish-American Colonies’, *American Historical Review*, Vol.23 (1917), pp.42-61.

² The term ‘frontier’ is used here to mean those regions that were distant from, and often peripheral to, the centres of Spanish power, where European settlement was sparse, and where, from the mid-sixteenth century until the late eighteenth century approximately, the Crown relied principally on the religious orders (often

supported by small contingents of soldiers) to incorporate both territory and peoples into the empire. Conceptually, however, the frontier has been more usefully defined as a zone 'of interaction between two different cultures', as a zone 'of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies', and as a 'contested ground', a zone, that is, of constant conflict and negotiation over power – economic, political, and cultural'. See, respectively, D. J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 10; H. Lamar and L. Thompson, 'Introduction', in H. Lamar and L. Thompson (eds.), *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 4; and D. J. Guy and T. E. Sheridan, 'On Frontiers', in D. J. Guy and T. E. Sheridan (eds.), *Contested Ground: Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 4.

³ See especially C. Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964) and *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967); J. Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); S. J. Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); and K. Spalding, *Huarochari: An Andean Society under Inca and Spanish Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984).

⁴ See, for example, R. Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers: An Ethnohistory of Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991); R. Horn, *Nahua-Spanish Relations in Central Mexico, 1519-1650*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); S. E. Ramirez, *The World Upside Down: Cross-Cultural Contact and Conflict in Sixteenth-Century Peru* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

⁵ B. Ganson, *The Guaraní Under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁶ R. C. Galgano, *Feast of Souls: Indians and Spaniards in the Seventeenth-Century Missions of Florida and New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

⁷ D. J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).

⁸ S. M. Deeds, *Defiance and Deference in Mexico's Colonial North: Indians under Spanish Rule in Nueva Vizcaya* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

⁹ Guy and Sheridan, 'On Frontiers', 13.

¹⁰ S. W. Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

¹¹ J. S. Saeger, *The Chaco Mission Frontier: The Guaycuruan Experience* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000).

¹² Every contacted group resorted to rebellion 'to turn its world right side up' within a generation of the arrival of Europeans, which in Nueva Vizcaya included missionaries, miners, merchants, grain producers and soldiers. Violence directed at Spaniards was not, moreover, limited to these revolts but broke out repeatedly thereafter.

¹³ At least among the Guaycuruans, however, persuasion, rather than punishment, was the preferred means to bring about religious compliance. Saeger argues that in the Chaco, 'where flight was easy', it was 'beyond the capability of Spanish authority' to punish Indians harshly for resisting Christian teachings (190).

¹⁴ J. A. Sandos, *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ As formulated by J. C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), and *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁶ For a definition of the term 'transculturation' see M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6. 'While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture', Pratt argues, 'they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone.' She defines the 'contact zone' as 'the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict'. The extent to which all three features need be present in the contact zone is debatable, but the concept is useful in this context.

¹⁷ In J. Axtell, 'Columbian Encounters: 1992-1995', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 52/4 (1995), 679.